

APPELLATE COURT BUILDING
MOUNT VERNON · ILLINOIS ·

Jefferson Co

HABS NO. 25-14.

HABS

Jul 1

41-MOVER,

1-

Reduced Copies of Measured Drawings
PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
CENTRAL ILLINOIS DISTRICT NO. 25

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
EDGAR E. LUNDEEN · DISTRICT OFFICER
BLOOMINGTON ILLINOIS

The Appellate Court Building, Mt. Vernon, Jefferson County
Illinois.

by Otis Winn, Murphysboro, Illinois, April 1934

The Constitution of 1848 provided for a judiciary consisting of a Supreme Court, Circuit Courts, County Courts and Justices of the Peace, with a provision that "inferior local courts, of civil and criminal jurisdiction, may be established by the General Assembly in the cities of this state, but such shall have an uniform organization and jurisdictions in such cities."

The Supreme Court was to consist of three judges, and the State was to be divided into three grand divisions with one judge elected in each grand division. Court should sit in each grand division at least once in each year. Reference: (History of Illinois and her people by G. W. Smith, Vol. III, page 143).

These grand divisions were denominated the southern, central, and northern; and sessions were held for these divisions in three separate places; Mount Vernon, Springfield and Ottawa, respectively. There were very decided disadvantages in this division of the court. The judges, not having adequate opportunities for consultation and discussion, sometimes handed down inadequately considered opinions. The demand for consolidation of the court grew more insistent, until, in 1897,

the court was consolidated by act of the General Assembly, and since then the sessions of the court have been held in Springfield beginning on the first Tuesday in October, December, February, April and June of each year.

As early as 1848 reference was made to "Mt. Vernon the home of Judges"

The Supreme Court, Southern district, was located in Mt. Vernon in 1848 with Samuel H. Treat Chief Justice.

"At this first term of the court we were required by the constitution to cast lots for terms to be held by each under the first election, which should be three, six or nine years.

Some members of the bar had expressed the opinion, or at least the expectation, that this proceeding would be had in open court in the presence of the bar and such other persons as should choose to attend, but we determined otherwise; so after the court had been opened on the first day without transacting any business of importance, the court was adjourned until the next day, Judge Treat presiding for the time. After the adjournment of the court we assembled privately in our room at Grant's, where we all stopped, and proceeded to dispatch that duty. Three strips of paper were prepared by Judge Trumbull. On one of these Judge Treat wrote the figure three, on another the figure six, and on another the figure nine, and I think I rolled or twisted them up, as near alike as possible without knowing the figure that was upon either, and placed them in a hat. It was agreed that each should draw one of the

pieces of paper from the hat, and that the figure found upon it should determine the time during which his commission should run. Judge Treat drew the first paper and upon it the figure nine was written. I drew the second and upon it the figure six was written, and of course Trumbull drew the last on which was written the figure three, and so our respective terms of office were decided under that constitution, which also provided that the one who drew the longest term should be the first chief justice during his term, and that afterward the judge holding the oldest commission should be the chief justice; and so it was that Judge Treat became the first chief justice of that court under the Constitution of 1848. Judge Treat then drew up an order reciting these facts and stating these results, which upon the opening of the court the next morning, was entered. Reference: "Early Bench and Bar of Illinois" by Caton pages 157-158.

From 1848 until November 1853 the court met in the old Odd Fellows hall on Main Street; paying an annual rent of \$75.00. From November 1853 until the court house was completed in about 1856 it met in the Masonic hall over Joel Pace's store at the same rent.

In 1854 an appropriation was obtained from the Legislature of \$6,000 for the building of a courthouse. T. B. Tanner Maj. Johnson, Zadoc Casey, Wm. J. Stephens and Dr. John N. Johnson were appointed Commissioners to take charge of the building and to superintend its construction. Plans were ob-

tained and it was found that the fund was insufficient; but finally parties of St. Louis were found who contracted to inclose it for the monsy, which was done, and in 1854 T. B. Tanner, who had been elected a member of the Legislature, obtained an additional appropriation of \$10,000 with which the building was completed according to original design. No record is available as to the architect or builder.

The Appellate Court, fourth distriot was oreated here in 1874. After the consolidation of the Supreme Court in 1897 this building has been used solely for the Appellate Court sittings, and is now called the Appellate Court Building. The first Appellate Judges were T. B. Tanner, presiding judge, J. C. Allen and G. W. Wall.

The building is now owned by the State of Illinois. Recently the height of the main rooms of the second floor was reduced by installing stamped metal ceilings six feet below the former ceiling. This was done to reduce the difficulty of heating. The architeotural effect gained nothing by the change.

Reference: History of Jefferson County, Illinois
by Wm. H. Perrin - 1833

Chas. W. Wynn.
Brown Pl. Morphysboro, Ill.
(Approved) Arge E. Lundeen

Revised 1936 by H.C.F.